

Training Never Ends

Being a firefighter is a very rewarding and challenging adventure. Whether you are a career or a volunteer firefighter, the job enables you to see and do many things that most people only hear of. Imagine sitting at home; getting an alert on your cell phone; responding to a call; putting on your turnout gear; and working as a team to mitigate an emergency. It is definitely an adventure. But firefighters are not just handed a set of turnout gear and told to get to work; they must go through constant training to be able to respond.

Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief
David Dyer



To become a firefighter, a person must complete the initial firefighter training. The minimum training for a support firefighter involves 60 hours of classroom and hands-on training. The subjects include fire science, response procedures, turnout gear, radio operations, water operations, hazardous materials, basic emergency medical and much more. Once that training is complete, the person is now a firefighter and able to respond to calls. However, the learning does not stop there.

Firefighters are constantly training in order to keep skills sharp and to learn the latest information in an ever changing world of emergency services. Each Union County firefighter is required to attend a certain amount of training each year. Career firefighters are required to attend a minimum of 120 hours of training annually. Volunteer firefighters are required to attend 60 hours annually.

The career firefighters have training hours that they must complete each month on shift. They train as a team on basic skills, rescue operations and the latest firefighting techniques. Volunteer firefighters have at least one training meeting each month. Each of these meetings involve classroom and hands-on skills training on various subjects ranging from firefighting to water supply to medical emergencies.

Every other month, the department has "county wide" training at the headquarters station 1. Firefighters from the eleven volunteer stations and the career staff attend. The training involves everyone and centers on scene operations and specialty skills. Firefighters operate as a group just as they would on an emergency scene.

In January, the county wide training involved Advanced

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Heard in Heaven

Acting out a parody of Barry Black, Saturday Night Live had him praying, "Lord, bless and forgive these braying jack**es." The man they parodied is a retired Rear Admiral, now Chaplain of the U.S. Senate. How did he appear on SNL's radar?

Actually, Dr. Black took it all in good humor. It happened during 2013 when the government "shut down" over budget bickering. His pointed and colorful prayers in the Senate chamber obviously attracted attention outside the room, hence his "appearance" on a comedy show. But his prayers were quite serious, asking divine intervention on behalf of the Senators, "replacing cynicism with faith and cowardice with courage." "Save us from the madness. Deliver us from the hypocrisy of attempting to sound reasonable while being unreasonable." The man of five academic degrees, whose biography is entitled "From the Hood to the Hill," speaks with courage and authority.

All Things New
Wayne Fowler



So with Dr. Black as the featured speaker, dignitaries gathered with great anticipation at the 2017 National Prayer Breakfast. His concern was not that his booming baritone voice be heard in that room, but that God's people make their voices heard in heaven. He noted the many weekly Bible studies and prayer gatherings for officials and staffers on Capitol Hill, and the many prayers for God's will to be done in the last election.

Quoting Tennyson, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of," Dr. Black is convinced of the efficacy of prayer. He said, "When we make our voices heard in heaven, it makes a palpable difference" on earth. His principal text was also Franklin Graham's at the inauguration, 1 Tim 2:1-4, which calls for prayer "on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority."

He explained that we pray from our need and with intimacy. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer... let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6). Need motivates prayer, both personal and national. Our nation needs healing and restoration of common decency and purpose. Jesus called his disciples "friends" (John 15:15). It is an intimate touch when God's hand is on you, like on Jabez and Ezekiel. He wants you to trust Him as a

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Commissioner's Questions

Q. Can you give us an update on the progress of the Shotgun Range?

A. A couple of months ago, we had another delay in beginning construction of the Shotgun Range. The county was requested to complete an additional cultural survey to be sure that the construction of this facility would have no negative impact on any Archeological Sites or Cultural Resources. Since we will be receiving Federal Funding for this project Native American Tribes can request this additional survey. An independent archeological consulting firm did research and fieldwork on the site of the Shotgun Range. They concluded that construction will have no impact on cultural resources and recommend no further surveying. At this point we are awaiting approval of their findings. Once received, we should soon have the final engineering plans and hope to go to bid, (a 30-day process of advertising) by the end of February. Hopefully, work could begin in March.

Q & A from Union County Commissioner
Lamar Paris



Q. What is the GDOT Public Information Open House about that we keep seeing advertised?

A. This Open House has been scheduled by the Georgia Department of Transportation to provide the citizens of Union County with information regarding the proposed widening of 19/129 headed north out of town. The proposed project will widen the road from Blue Ridge Street here in the city limits all the way to Nottley Dam Road. It is stated in their letter that they will provide the public with an opportunity to view the proposed project, ask questions and comment on the proposal. The meeting will be held on February 21, 2017 at the Civic Center from 4 to 6 p.m. Attending this is a great way for the public to stay informed on what the Georgia Department of Transportation is planning on doing. However, this project is still a few years away from beginning construction.

Q. I saw there was a survey put out into our community regarding updating the Comprehensive Plan for Union County and Blairsville. What is this?

A. A Comprehensive Plan for a community is basically a

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Letters to the Editor

Another Thank You

Dear Editor,

Thanks again to Penny Connell, and to Candy Retter, for expressing my views, also.

I am a former Baptist deacon, who eventually allowed reason to overcome unsubstantiated beliefs. I, too, have a hard time accepting what I perceive as widespread intellectual laziness regarding the state of the nation and its institutions. The so-called 'religious right', along with the new administration, seems dead-set on forcing their religious dogma on everyone; in effect, discrimination based on their interpretation of personal freedom. They claim (erroneously) that this is a Christian Nation; it's not. Ours is a secular nation, and I praise our founders for that. Statistics show 23% of respondents in the last census list their religious preference as 'None', and it's growing.

I will continue to oppose those who don't seem to accept the phrase in our pledge to our flag, which says, "— with Liberty and Justice for all".

William Parks

Pray for our Leaders

Dear Editor,

I want to preface this response to Candy Retter by stating that I am using "ignorant" not in an insulting way, but in the sense of "not being informed on a particular subject". Just as I am ignorant on quantum physics, you are ignorant on your knowledge of the Bible. The Bible states that all kings and leaders are chosen by God and are used as His instruments. Does that mean that they are always godly? Absolutely not. As a Christian man, I know that God wants us to pray for our leaders in lieu of talking smack about them. Imagine that if you can. Even if it is Obama or Trump.

As for Trump using fear to push his agenda? Did you see any of Hillary's ads? Particularly the one insinuating we would be in an all out nuclear war if he were elected? What about Obama ads against Romney showing elderly people in wheelchairs getting pushed off cliffs if Romney were elected? You live in a red state, so they didn't bother pushing these ads here (arrogance that probably cost Hillary the election), but you can find them with a quick online search. The truth is, both parties use scare tactics. And I think it's pathetic.

Your "1%" regurgitated rhetoric does not hold water, either. Trump has been president for 2 weeks. Obama was president for 8 years. Why did he not eviscerate the policies that supposedly exist for the evil 1% to stomp on the heads of us little people whilst he was president? Because

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Thanks Obama?

Dear Editor,

In response to Bill Cunningham's letter of praise for the eight years of surviving President Obama, I think he often missed the marks.

First, you think "the majority of American" think we're better off than when he took office, you sure don't speak for me and the majority of people I know. Obama didn't "save the economy" after his election. The economy, tanked due to the Federal Reserve's drop in interest rates which allowed people to buy a house they couldn't afford. The economic recovery has been the slowest since the 1920s. The labor participation rate and wages have been virtually stagnant and in some cases gone down.

The Affordable Care Act has been a disaster and become much more un-affordable. In some states, Arizona being the highest, increase in premiums has more than doubled. Remember "If you like your doctor, you can keep him." "The average American household will see a \$2,500 a year savings". Insurance companies have dropped Obamacare so much that in many places, some people have only one or two insurers who will accept it. "There wasn't even

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"Now...where should we start pruning?"

News Media

Dear Editor,

Subject: CBS News Suggestion

I would recommend that on your commercials where you claim honesty and integrity that you change it to honesty and bias. Your station has clearly moved further and further left of fair and balanced news during the last eight years. I switched off CNN, ABC, NBC and MSNBC long ago because of their clear and expressed distaste for honest news in favor of fake news. It's bad enough that you slant the news to favor the liberal view point and do your best to show as much negativity against our new President, his cabinet picks and his agenda as you can. Even the body language and facial expressions of your reporters is so obviously slanted that it

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Immigration

Dear Editor,

Dear Mr. Riley:

In 1908, when my then-fifteen year-old dad stood in line at Ellis Island, waiting to be processed, was he subjected to "extreme vetting"?

Those immigration officials asked him questions about his country of origin, they inspected him for signs of communicable disease; they palpated his armpits, his groin, his neck; they examined his satchel, his fingernails, his teeth, his eyes; they wrote his family history...

Those same officials treated the other two million immigrants the same: immigrants from all the nations of Europe and from all around the Mediterranean, who, that year, like my dad, were required to stand patiently, unobtrusively, humbly, in line at Ellis Island.

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Affordable Care Act

Dear Editor,

I understand that the Affordable Care Act will probably be repealed soon, and I understand as well the frustration that many feel about the mandate, the inefficient roll out of the program, and the increasing cost of premiums. I was frustrated too. But when it is repealed I urge citizens to insist that lawmakers keep three provisions that are now available to all Americans under the plan, even those who receive their insurance through their work. Two of the provisions are well-known, but the third is the most important to me and has received little attention.

The first is the provision that pre-existing conditions will not be used as an excuse to limit insurance or make it unaffordable. In the past a serious condition—such as heart disease, diabetes, or cancer—could keep Americans from finding an affordable plan. The second allows parents to keep their children on the plan until they reach the age of 26. This provision gives the young people time to grow up a bit, until

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The Bald Mountains

When first given the saw I thought it was probably used to cut firewood. However, I soon learned this saw had history behind it. My grandfather and grandmother purchased the first 80 acres of their farm sometime around 1937. Papa cut each tree on his land with this cross cut saw. I asked him about removing the stumps. Papa told me that he burned the cleared area and then plowed around each stump. He said, "After 7-8 years the stumps rotted and you had yourself a cleared field". Try to imagine the amount of work it took to saw those trees and plow around those stumps. It would have taken much longer without the use of fire. Fire has been used by man for years as a tool. I have read the Cherokee used fire to maintain clearings for agricultural purposes. It is also speculated that the balds on top of our highest mountains were created with the use of fire. An interesting story about how these Bald mountaintops originated was told by the Cherokee.

Around The Farm
Wickey Cummings



Many years ago the people of the Blue Ridge lived in great fear of a large winged predator. The bird lived on some high craggy mountain peaks and patrolled our skies much like Bald Eagles or Red-Tailed Hawks. This bird was so large that it could swoop out of the sky and capture a small adult with its sharp talons. Afterwards the bird would lift off the ground and fly back to its nest where the human prey was delivered to the giant bird's offspring. In an effort to defend themselves against the attacks of this large bird the Cherokee cleared the highest mountains of trees and shrubs. They also posted sentries on these mountaintops. When the large bird was spotted the sentry would build a fire and place green limbs on the fire which resulted in heavy smoke. This smoke would let the villages know of the impending trouble. Sounds like a good plan to me. However, even a strong chain can be broken at its weakest link.

A village of the Cherokee close to Hayesville appointed a sentry to stand guard on what is know today as Standing Indian Mountain. This fellow tended to be on the lazy side and was not too worried about the giant bird. And after a few months of sentry duty on the mountain he began to relax. During one of his naps the big bird appeared. It swooped down from the skies and grabbed a young maiden. The great bird flew toward the bald mountain with the maiden dead in its talons. Meanwhile the sentry still slept. The bird landed in a tall tree above a large cliff near where the sentry slept. The sentry still slept and this angered God because the man had failed to protect his village. So, God sent a bolt of lightning which killed the bird.

The lightning was so strong it also killed

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AT Hike

It's impossible to walk in the woods and be in a bad mood at the same time. Fortunately for us, Union County has a plethora of hiking trails to choose from. You can choose from moderate trails like those in our beautiful Meeks Park, the new Nottley Dam Reservoir Trails, or the scenic trail down to Helton Creek Falls. You may also choose more strenuous hikes like the Duncan Ridge Trail, the Arkaquah Trail, or the Coosa Backcountry Trail. The most famed trail, The Appalachian Trail, also crosses through Union County at Woody Gap and Neel's Gap. In fact, the only covered portion of the white blaze 2,181 mile trail passes right through the structure of Mountain Crossings at Walasi-Yi.

Blairsville-Union County Chamber Tourism Director
Tobie Chandler



Blairsville-Union County was designated an Appalachian Trail Community in March of 2011. This designation recognizes our community as one that is committed to promoting and protecting the AT and are neighborly to those who trod the Trail. A core group of volunteers have been working hard on several projects including compiling a FREE Union County Hiking Guide, a FREE Union County History Guide, and most recently a project showcasing the History of the AT in North Georgia which is displayed on a kinetic sculpture at Mountain Crossings created by Blairsville's own local artist, Al Garnto.

In preparation for the hiking season this spring, Mountain Crossings is preparing for their Thru Hiker Kick Off party on Saturday.

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Shade Trees in Georgia

Many of us are aware of National Arbor Day as it is celebrated on the last Friday in April, but did you know that Georgia's State Arbor Day is observed on the third Friday in February? Though it is more pleasant to plant trees in the cool spring weather than the cold wet winter, February is one of the best times to plant trees in Georgia. The cold weather keeps trees in dormancy, decreasing the risk of transplant shock. If trees begin new growth and are then transplanted, there is a much greater risk of damaging and stressing the tree.

From the Ground Up
Melissa Mattee



Always be sure to keep the planting site in mind when you choose your tree. Though you can amend soil to a certain extent, you cannot always change sun exposure, soil drainage, and precipitation. Test your soil before planting so you know the pH, nutrient quality and the soil texture before planting. Finally, be aware of man-made structures that can affect growth such as underground pipes, utility lines and rights-of-way.

Though for most plants, incorporating organic matter into the soil is always recommended, this is not necessarily the case with trees. It is much more important to have consistent organic material presence throughout the life of the tree than ensuring there is a lot in the initial planting hole. Mulch is the best organic source as it protects the roots, retains moisture and prevents weeds. The mulch is eventually naturally incorporated into the soil over time, increasing the overall soil quality consistently over a long period of time.

Many shade trees are bought balled and burlapped, container grown, or bare-root. Each of these types has a different ideal time that it should be planted. For balled and burlapped, plant in late fall if you can. Container-grown trees should be planted early to late fall, and bare-root should be planted in late winter. Though these are the ideal times for each tree, they can probably also handle being planted either in late fall or late winter, which is why Georgia Arbor Day is so late in February.

Balled and burlapped trees should al-

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Kenneth West
Owner/Publisher

Charles Duncan
Editor

Website: www.nganews.com

E-mail: northgeorgianews@hotmail.com

Mailing: POBox 2029, Blairsville, GA 30514

Derek Richards
Advertising Director

Todd Forrest
Staff Writer

Shawn Jarrard
Staff Writer

Lily Avery
Staff Writer

Lowell Nicholson
Photographer

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Phone: (706) 745-6343 Fax: (706) 745-1830 * P.O. Box 2029, Blairsville, GA 30514